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Identical letters dated 29 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the fifty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/947).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again expresses its regret that the authors of the reports of the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) continue to take a negative and politicized approach to the Syrian Arab Republic and its institutions. They continue to make the same errors, which is something of a major departure from their mandates, and they continue to deliberately ignore the observations of and concerns expressed by the Syrian Arab Republic with regard to previous Secretariat reports.

The Syrian Arab Republic has concluded that the present report, like its predecessors, is replete with errors and does not address the real humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic or what Syrians need to alleviate their suffering and harsh conditions and strengthen their resilience. The Syrian Government reiterates that by continuing to take this politicized approach when preparing these reports, which further only the agendas of certain influential States in the Security Council and their proxies in the region, OCHA will harm the reputation and credibility of the entire United Nations.

What follows is an overview of the position of the Syrian Government with respect to the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the report under consideration. It would also like to stress the following points:

- Surprisingly, it is alleged in the report that the Syrian Government did not approve the bimonthly convoy plan for September and October. The truth is that the Government asked the United Nations to include areas that have been liberated, but which the Organization had originally classified as besieged or hard-to-reach, in the monthly regular programme for aid delivery.
- There is no indication in the report that the illegitimate international coalition led by United States of America committed yet another crime against innocent Syrian civilians. On 13 and 14 October 2018, coalition warplanes used internationally prohibited white phosphorus bombs against homes in the city of Hajin, Dayr al-Zawr Governorate. Several civilians, mostly women and

children, were killed and injured in that heinous crime. Yet in the report, it is merely stated that those operations are severely affecting civilians (para. 4). On 19 October 2018, the international coalition added yet another heinous crime to its criminal record when coalition aircraft bombarded homes in the villages of Susah and Albu Badran in the southern countryside of Dayr al-Zawr governorate, killing 62 civilians, mostly women and children, and injuring an unknown number of others, some of whom are in critical condition. The report indicates that those operations were directed against the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but the crime that was perpetrated in the villages of Susah and Albu Badran is a war crime and a crime against humanity and demonstrates, once again, that the States of the coalition have no regard for international law and international humanitarian law.

- The Syrian Arab Republic is astonished that the authors continue to inflate the importance of isolated incidents in certain parts of Syria and cite, in relation to allegations that hospitals are being targeted, inaccurate information and statistics that are taken largely from the armed terrorist groups themselves, in particular the members of the terrorist White Helmets organization, who are the primary source of information of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Meanwhile, OHCHR and its sources, as well OCHA representatives, intentionally do not inform members that, for example, the attacks against populated areas of Aleppo Governorate are being carried out by armed terrorist groups (paras. 13 and 15), which are called "non-State armed opposition groups" in the report, in violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

- In paragraph 21, the authors simply note that civilians across Syria are suffering and being killed, abducted and tortured, without clearly stating that the practices of and violations committed by armed terrorist groups are the causes of that suffering. Generalization leads to error. Moreover, the Secretariat must not hesitate to draw attention to the crimes that are being committed by terrorist groups.

- The paragraphs concerning United Nations requests for visas contain many mistakes. We should like to stress that, in September 2018, United Nations agencies submitted 64 entry visa requests, of which 59, that is to say 92 per cent, were approved. Four requests remain pending and only one request was rejected. On the other hand, the United Nations submitted 104 visa renewal requests in September, of which 103 were approved and one remains pending.

- The Syrian Government authorized United Nations humanitarian agencies to send, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, a humanitarian assistance convoy to the Rukban camp directly from within the Syrian Arab Republic. It should be noted that international humanitarian law makes it incumbent upon the occupying Power, which, in this case, is the United States of America, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians residing in the camp. However, on 26 October 2018, after reaching the 55 km mark, the United Nations team quickly returned to Damascus because of the deteriorating security situation and reports that the ISIL terrorist organization was going to attack the convoy in the American-controlled area, despite the promise the United States of America had made to the United Nations that it would guarantee the convoy's security. This clearly demonstrates that the United States is primarily responsible for hindering delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Rukban camp and the suffering of the camp's residents.

- The Syrian Arab Republic emphasizes the need for increased international humanitarian support in order to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of Syrians, especially given the modest level of international financing, which, to date, stands at no more than 48 per cent of what is needed. In their review conferences, donors have tied their funding pledges to political conditions that are incompatible with the principles of humanitarian work. In particular, they refuse to fund the rehabilitation of basic service facilities that could help strengthen the resilience of Syrians and support the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas in a safe and dignified manner. Despite their importance, the authors of the report ignore those issues and conditions, thereby demonstrating that they do not take seriously enough the humanitarian situation in Syria.

- The Syrian Arab Republic regrets that the authors of the report, in conformity with the instructions of certain Western States, are misguidedly promoting cross-border assistance, which has been proven to be ineffective. It has also been established that it is impossible to ensure that such assistance reaches its rightful civilian beneficiaries. Cross-border assistance must be regarded, in one way or another, as indirect support for the terrorists, who are seizing it, and one of the factors that enables them to continue their terrorist operations in Syria.

- With regard to Idlib, the Syrian Arab Republic underscores that it welcomed the Sochi agreement reached on 17 September 2018. It will continue to welcome any initiative that spares Syrian lives and welcomes any initiative that can help restore security and safety in every part of Syria that has been beset by terrorism. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that it will continue to combat terrorism until it has liberated every inch of Syrian territory from the grip of terrorism, terrorists or any illegitimate foreign military presence.

- More than once, the Syrian Arab Republic has requested the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Damascus to work with the relevant United Nations agencies operating in Syria to quickly develop a response for any emergency that might arise in Idlib Governorate. It has also told the Resident Coordinator that it was possible to take action immediately.

- The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that it rejects the unwarranted and irresponsible conduct of the report's authors and OHCHR officials, who persist in using the term "non-State armed opposition" to refer to the ISIL and Nusrah Front terrorist organizations, even though the authors are aware that those two organizations appear on the Security Council lists relating to the Al-Qaida terrorist organization and associated individuals and entities. Those two organizations have links with many terrorist groups deployed in Syria, including, in particular, the "White Helmets" terrorist organization, which is an intelligence and logistical tool being used by certain Western States to support the Nusrah front and ISIL terrorist organizations. More specifically, it is the proxy that has been assigned the task of devising theatrical performances to mislead global public opinion with respect to allegations relating to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Moreover, the members of this organization participate directly in the acts of terrorism that the above-mentioned organizations perpetrate against Syrians and Syrian institutions.

- The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that the Secretariat, when preparing its reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria, should use experts who are capable of choosing their terminology without bias and in a manner that takes into account legal considerations and is professional and objective. Otherwise, the Secretariat reports in question will simply reflect the wishes of certain

Western States that have adopted extremist positions with respect to the Syrian State.

- In paragraph 9 of the report, the authors state that "restrictions around commercial activities were reported to have resulted in high prices for some key commodities", clearly ignoring the real causes of the rise in prices, inter alia the unilateral coercive economic measures that certain States and regional entities, in particular the United States and the States of the European Union, have imposed on the Syrian Arab Republic. Those measures affect such sectors as health, education, energy, electricity and others that are vital to supporting Syrians and meeting their basic needs. The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call upon the Secretariat to pressure the States and entities that have imposed those measures to lift them immediately. The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that the continued imposition of those measures is the primary obstacle to ensuring the basic needs of the Syrian people, improving their humanitarian and living conditions, and putting in place the necessary conditions for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes and the restoration of normal life.

The Syrian Arab Republic regards the authors' continued failure to address this critical issue as irresponsible conduct and a clear sign of lack of professionalism.

In the report under consideration, the authors attempt to further blur mandates and competences by addressing the political situation and using many politicized terms. The Syrian Arab Republic rejects that approach. Such terms have nothing to do with the authors' mandate or the topic of the report, which is supposed to be about the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Syrian Arab Republic once agai calls upon the Security Council to stop issuing these monthly reports, which many see as a waste of time, money and human resources, and replace them with quarterly reports that are written in a professional and credible manner.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative